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STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
109<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
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ON  
PLAN COLOMBIA: MAJOR SUCCESSES AND NEW CHALLENGES



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Chairman Hyde, Ranking Member Lantos, and distinguished Members of the Committee: I am honored to appear before you today as the Acting United States Interdiction Coordinator. I also serve as the Acting Director of the Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement at the Department of Homeland Security.

I have devoted much of my professional career to drug interdiction, including several assignments in the 1990s, when I worked to improve the coordination of interagency and international drug law enforcement efforts. Plan Colombia and other key legislative initiatives were passed by Congress during that time in an effort to develop and implement more effective interagency coordinating mechanisms and international relationships. In recent years, my career took me in different directions until I assumed my current position in October 2004. It is in this context that I would like to share my observations.

In terms of interdiction, there are successes to report. The United States and the Government of Colombia have achieved record levels for Transit Zone cocaine interdiction, vessel seizures, and arrests in each of the past two calendar years. In 2003, we removed 210 metric tons of cocaine that was in the Transit Zone bound for the United States. In 2004, that figure rose to 248 metric tons, which is approximately twice the amount of cocaine that was seized or removed from the Transit Zone in 1999. Let me discuss a few of the key factors that I believe have led to these achievements.

Intelligence about maritime trafficking is the best it has ever been. For years, our ships and planes patrolled vast expanses of ocean, often without the benefit of good intelligence. Today, our forces often have real-time, actionable intelligence so they can narrow their focus and improve their probability of detecting smugglers. The resultant increase in successful interdictions has supported new investigations and prosecutions which in turn has improved our intelligence and overall awareness as to how the traffickers are operating. In particular, Operation Panama Express, an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) initiative, has become a model for interagency partnering. Panama Express investigations are developing intelligence leads that have dramatically increased interdiction successes. At the same time, interdictions are leading to the successful prosecution of both maritime transporters and higher level drug traffickers. Thus the cycle of aggressive investigations, intelligence generation, interdictions, and prosecutions has enabled our interagency assets to achieve results never before realized.

Operations in the Transit Zone are better coordinated. The Joint Interagency Task Force model works. In particular, Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) in Key West has become a powerful interagency and international team that is fusing information from law enforcement agencies, the Intelligence Community and our international partners. This combined interagency and international task force is producing remarkable results and has improved the effectiveness of our detection, monitoring and end-game platforms. In 2003, a Joint Operating Area was created which assigned Joint Interagency Task Force South total responsibility for the primary south-to-north drug trafficking threat vectors from South America. This has improved the efficiency and synchronization of our limited forces while at the same time allowed Joint Interagency Task Force West to refocus its attention toward threats emanating from the Western Pacific. It should be noted that the Government of Colombia has two full-time liaisons that are

part of the JIATF-S team, which also has representatives from nine other countries in the hemisphere. JIATF-S now communicates and coordinates operations directly with the Colombian Navy and Air Force operations centers.

In addition, we continue to support the Government of Colombia's efforts to stop illegal aerial trafficking. In August 2003, Colombia resumed its thoroughly vetted and robustly staffed Air Bridge Denial Program, which receives U.S. support under a Presidential Determination. This carefully crafted program allows Colombian Air Force interceptors to use lethal force—as a last resort—against noncompliant aircraft inside Colombian airspace. Since this program resumed, 22 suspected narcotrafficking aircraft have been forced down; 20 of those aircraft have been destroyed and 10.3 metric tons of cocaine have been seized. Although a majority of cocaine is now being transported across the Andes by land, traffickers still try to exploit Colombian airspace to move money, drugs, and weapons. By continuing to support the Air Bridge Denial Program, we are helping the Government of Colombia thwart aerial trafficking efforts, especially in those remote regions where aircraft and helicopters provide the only viable means of transportation.

Maritime interdiction performance, while currently at record levels, is suffering from a reduction in long-range Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) capacity. Maritime Patrol Aircraft are a critical linchpin that are used to detect smugglers and support end-game operations. During calendar year 2004, MPA participated in 73 percent of the cocaine removal events from noncommercial maritime conveyances in the Transit Zone. In the fourth quarter of last year, these figures rose to 91 percent. The MPA shortfall has been caused primarily by unforeseen wing corrosion problems in the U.S. Navy P-3 fleet and the retirement of the entire Netherlands P-3 fleet. As the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, I have focused on mitigating this shortfall. We are closing the gap, though not completely. In particular, Customs and Border Protection has added 400 flight hours per month to JIATF-S operations. The United States Air Force has returned to the Colombia Air Bridge Denial program with two E-3 aircraft. This will allow Customs and Border Protection P-3 Airborne Early Warning aircraft, which are currently supporting the Air Bridge Denial Program, to fly Maritime Patrol missions in the Transit Zone. The United States Coast Guard has increased the use of its HC-130 hours in the Transit Zone and has an MPA gap initiative in the President's Fiscal Year 2006 budget. This initiative would provide more Transit Zone on station flying hours and a more robust maintenance support capability at the Forward Operating Location at Comalapa, El Salvador. MPA coverage remains crucial to sustaining Transit Zone interdiction successes and I will continue to work hard to restore this capacity.

The support provided by our international partners is also critical to Transit Zone interdiction successes. Currently, France and the United Kingdom deploy and use their surveillance aircraft, armed helicopters and surface ships in counterdrug missions. The British NIMROD, a highly capable long-range maritime surveillance aircraft, has been especially effective in detecting and tracking drug smuggling vessels. The Canadian government is working with the United States Southern Command and Joint Interagency Task Force South to coordinate future Canadian P-3 aircraft deployments to the Caribbean as well. This committed international and interagency effort is essential to Transit Zone operational success.

International cooperation has also been critical in eliminating seams that traffickers once exploited. The United States now has 26 maritime bilateral agreements that have put the smugglers on the defensive. Flag state maritime boarding authority is much easier to gain, particularly for Colombia-flagged vessels. We communicate directly, operator-to-operator, with our Colombian counterparts, often turning boarding requests around in minutes when such requests in the past took hours. The smugglers now have less time to react and avoid law enforcement, and we are able to board in time to find contraband and evidence to support prosecutions. For example, in Fiscal Year 2004, the United States used our maritime bilateral agreement with Colombia in 34 cases, resulting in the seizure of over 52 metric tons of cocaine, the arrest of 199 traffickers and the seizure of 34 vessels.

Colombia has become a regional leader and has conducted regional drug interdiction operations with the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, United States, and Panamanian forces. Another example of Colombia's partnership is an operation this month with a Colombian Navy frigate that is operating under the tactical control of JIATF-South. At the same time, a U.S. Coast Guard fixed wing Falcon aircraft is operating from Aruba while a U.S. Navy S-3 aircraft is flying from Curacao in support of this operation. The U.S. Coast Guard is also embarking Colombian Navy officers aboard their cutters for professional exchanges.

In conclusion, the groundwork for these successes was laid some time ago, and those efforts are now paying dividends. We will not rest on these successes since there remain many challenges. As we continually seek to improve our results, we should remember that without the support to Colombia and the ensuing cooperation from President Uribe and his Administration, we would not be discussing these successes. The Government of Colombia has contributed significantly to our efforts and we need to stay the course and sustain our support and relationship with Colombia—it is paying dividends.

Looking ahead, I have placed a priority on seeking alternatives that will further increase interdiction capabilities in the Source and Transit Zones. I have been engaged with the entire interdiction community to improve our capabilities and effectiveness to ensure we sustain those strategies and operations that are working, and keep the pressure up on all fronts. We will continue to assess our efforts and report our progress to Congress.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to answering questions from you and your Committee.